

*The following message was posted in #announcements by Jack Boyd at 1:29 PM ET on Dec 29, 2020.*

Hello MAGFest Staff,

We want to try our best to provide some further context and clarity that led to yesterday's staffing decisions as well as some immediate steps that are being taken.

First and foremost, MAGFest is not canceled.

Many individuals have been working tirelessly to put together some great virtual programming for Jan. 22-24. COVID may have limited what we can do, but we're still trying to come together for some fun.

The board will be reaching out to the vision team, div heads, and some department heads over the next few days to ensure we can still showcase all the work the organization has been doing over the last few months. If your department wants to schedule a meeting with the BoD or are needing support to make sure your contributions are highlighted at the digital event, please email [bod@magfest.org](mailto:bod@magfest.org) as soon as possible.

As to recent allegations made against the organization, there's always two sides to every story. The reasons behind staffing changes were valid and documented, not retaliatory or malicious. We're limited in what we can share. It's not an excuse, it's just the truth. We don't have the luxury of creating a public website to air our grievances, we must follow employment privacy laws and organizational management procedures.

No matter what anyone says to the contrary, we value everyone's contributions and have strived to build an organization where there are appropriate and healthy ways to have your voice heard and create change.

We get it. Change is hard, messy and often unpopular.

This year, like many nonprofits across the country, we've been fighting for MAGFest's literal survival. Throughout, we never stopped trying to figure out ways to bring the community together. Some things worked, some things didn't. Some things you liked, some things you hated.

But the challenges facing MAGFest extend beyond the pandemic and the current Board Leadership.

To quote Paul Good, Tresch and Dom, [Over the years] *"As MAGFest grew, more conflicts began to arise, reducing the amount of available time to spend on each, but instead of collaborating excitedly on a series of new problems through a shared lens, the type of conflicts tended to be very similar in nature. The board wasn't struggling with the problems so much as*

*we were struggling with each other. This resulted in the beginning of a long pattern of exhaustion among the board that has culminated in today.”*

The challenges of running a 25,000+ person organization with a small, tightly knit Board of Directors who resisted organizational changes, manifested itself in a myriad of self-destructive ways, over and over, year after year.

It exhausted Dom to the point where a new ED was brought in to run the organization and manage the office and board. The status quo drove him to quit. Paul Birtel was brought in with the hopes of bridging the divide and charting a path forward.

Then to compound everything, the pandemic struck.

To quote Paul, Tresch and Dom, “Unfortunately, the differences still hung around, and they weren’t going away on their own. The three of us were still exhausted with the whole situation and had one foot out the door. There were still unresolved trust issues in regards to the board that were possibly being projected onto Paul Birtel. Jack, Eli, and Joel were taking on a huge amount of work to keep the engines running, Paul Birtel was doing his best to steer the ship, but cracks were forming in the hull, and the ship was sinking.”

In some ways, they’re not wrong. Faced with the single most unprecedented challenge facing MAGFest, that was seriously threatening our organization’s very existence, we continued to have challenges communicating amongst ourselves and with our community. To make matters worse, the three most senior Board members were “*exhausted and had one foot out the door.*”

They are correct in that Paul Birtel, Jack, Eli, Joel, Bunny and the entire staff worked tirelessly to figure out a way to meet the challenges of the pandemic, while still dealing with the needed organizational changes to stop this seemingly endless cycle of challenges around leadership, management and communications.

These challenges we’ve been facing required “All Hands on Deck,” unfortunately, half of our Board of Directors were largely missing in action until November when things came to a head with the Friends of MAGFest website, demands and ultimatums. Instead of being our partner and helping us come up with reasonable solutions, they demanded the resignations of the remaining voting members of the Board and said they’d take it from here.

That is by definition, is a return to the status quo.

We’re laser focused on three things.

1. Weathering the pandemic.
2. Instituting organizational changes that stop the cycle of dysfunction and give more members and volunteers a voice in those changes.
3. Restoring the trust among our staff, volunteers and members.

As you may have already seen, three of the current Board members are stepping back, to let us “*succeed or fail on their own merit*” and while we thank them for their service and honor the work they have done building our beloved MAGFest, we are taking steps we feel are necessary to succeed.

Our intent is to make significant long-term changes to the structure and makeup of the MAGFest Board of Directors. But that’s not something that should just be decided internally. This point has itself been hugely contentious within the Board itself, but a majority of voting members strongly feel that adding more people to the Board and soliciting more community involvement in the discussion around Board changes is crucial. To help in this endeavor, we intend to add several temporary Board members who would be added with a term length of ~3-4 months.

The main thing those members can help us discuss with the community and ultimately decide is the long-term makeup of the Board itself.

- How many members should we have?
- How should those members be chosen?
- What responsibilities should belong to the Board and which of its current responsibilities should be delegated?
- How and in what manner should the Board communicate about its work and decisions to the volunteer base?
- What changes to our bylaws might help enact and clarify the Board’s structure, makeup, and responsibilities?

Some of you may remember that the MAGFest office underwent a huge restructuring in 2019, driven by a [RACI analysis](#) of the office’s responsibilities. We began discussing running through the same kind of evaluation for the Board itself in [July of 2019](#), but COVID got in the way of our doing this in early 2020 as we originally planned. This kind of evaluation can provide a useful framework for navigating these kinds of decisions.

We intend to ask the new temporary Board members to not only help us in this kind of evaluation, but also to help involve interested members of the community in answering these and other questions. We also believe that these new members will provide fresh perspectives, both by providing additional diversity to the Board as a group, and by coming in with an outside view.

Along those lines, we also intend to ask these new members to fully review the events of 2020 to provide feedback on how the Board has been operating, to better inform how the Board should operate in the future as it addresses all of these questions and more.

We expect to announce the names of the new members before next week’s Fireside Chat to give the community time to offer feedback on the nominees. We will then discuss more specifics of the timeline next week at the Tuesday 1/5 Fireside chat.

To close, once again, we quote Paul, Tresch and Dom, *“MAGFest was always and should always be a high-risk organization, dedicated to taking leaps of faith in finding new and better ways to operate and communicate. To find new and better ways to enable people to do all of those exciting things that we wish we could do elsewhere in life, but can’t, because it seems impractical, or risky, or costly.”*

We couldn’t agree more.

Like many of you, all we want to do is to get back to making memories, gathered together in-person, whenever it is safe to do so. We’re not saying that we won’t make mistakes along the way. We just want you to know we’re laser focused on making that a reality.

So we’re going to work even harder over the next few months to give you a greater voice in how MAGFest will continue to change, evolve and grow. Most importantly, we’re committed to being open and transparent with you.

We wish we could share more, and we’ll have further details for you soon, but in the meantime, if you have questions, comments, concerns, please email us at [bod@magfest.org](mailto:bod@magfest.org).